

Carolina Bays



Francis Marion National Forest



U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service
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Carolina Bays have been a source of fascination for visitors to the low country of South Carolina since the time of their discovery. They are fragile and unique ecosystems: wetland habitats that exhibit a variety of vegetative components. Some bays are open-water depressions dotted with pond cypress trees and rimmed by pitcher plants and sundew. Other bays are thick pocosins of shrubby sweetbay, fetterbush and pond pines. They can be one acre or thousands of acres.

Carolina Bays are symmetrical. They are generally oval depressions and the long axis always runs from northwest to southeast. The geological origin of these wetlands remains a mystery.

Only about 200 of South Carolina's original 2,600 natural bays remain in their pristine state. Many have fallen victim to drainage and clearing. About 25 well-defined bays are protected on the Francis Marion National Forest.

For more information:

Wambaw Office

PO Box 788, McClellanville, SC 29458

Phone (843) 887-3257

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Witherbee Office

2421 Witherbee Road, Cordesville, SC 29434

Phone: (843) 336-3248

Hours: Monday-friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center

5821 US Highway 17 North, Awendaw, SC 29429

Phone (843) 928-3368

Hours: Tuesday- Saturday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

The map shows some of the bays that can be explored on the forest. Some of the unique plants and animals to discover include:

- Amphibians
- Blueflags
- Carnivorous plants like the trumpet pitcher and sundew
- Pond Pine
- Pond Cypress
- Songbirds

Directions: See map for directions to some of the bays

Camping: Not permitted

Safety: During temperate months, be prepared for biting insects and high temperatures. Be advised of big-game hunting seasons. Avoid using the trail during excessively wet periods.

Further reading: Final Report: Inventory of populations of proposed endangered and threatened species of vascular plants on the Francis Marion National Forest in Berkeley and Charleston Counties, South Carolina.

Porcher, R.D. 1980. Contract No. 53-43ZP-8-00008, USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, Atlanta, Ga.

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